

# THE GURUDWARA

## (The Sikh Temple)



Photo by: Balvinder Kaur

Published by:

© THE SIKH MISSIONARY SOCIETY U.K. (Regd.)  
10 Featherstone Road, Southall, Middlesex, UB2 5AA  
Tel & Fax: 0181-574 1902

# GURUDWARA KARAMSAR, RARA SAHIB, PUNJAB.



The entire cost for the reprinting of fourth edition of this Publication has been donated  
by S. Balwant Singh Dahiya, 74 Vine Lane, Harington, Midxh UB10 9LX.

# THE SIKH TEMPLE

by

Mr. G. S. SIDHU, M.A.

Third Impression April 1988 - 10,000 copies

Third edition Copyright ©

Fourth Impression July 1996 - 10,000 copies

Fourth edition Copyright ©

Published by

© THE SIKH MISSIONARY SOCIETY U.K. (Regd.)  
10 Featherstone Road, Southall, Middlesex, UB2 5AA  
Tel & Fax: 0181-574 1902



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have great pleasure in bringing out this small tract written by Mr. G.S. Sidhu. This is one of our series of books produced for non-Sikh people who wish to know about the virile Sikhs and their institutions.

Unlike the temples of some of the other faiths, the Sikh Temple serves not only as a place of worship but also as a social and community centre where everybody is welcome and a family atmosphere is created by the devotees. Those expecting to find a grave-like silence in the Sikh Temple will feel disappointed. The usual western way of sitting in the temples is not appreciated by the Sikhs who wish to be humble outwardly and inwardly, at least when in the Temple. Prayer books may or may not be read by all the devotees. Listening to the Guru's word is thought to be as much meritorious as its reading. One can come and go at any time but no Sikh would leave a Sikh Temple when the congregational Sikh prayer is being offered.

Mr. Sidhu has very admirably tried to describe each aspect of the Sikh Temple briefly and I am thankful to him for giving his time and energy in producing this magnificent tract. My thanks are also due to Mr. Eddie Wignall, M.A., Chairman of the Urban District Council, Crawley, who has very kindly read the manuscript and added a very concise and to the point foreword to it. I am also grateful to the following ladies and gentlemen for reading, correcting and improving the tract:-

1. Mr. Piara Singh Sambhi, 16 Sholebroke Place, Leeds 7.
2. Mr. Piara Singh, 19 York Road, Leyton, E.10.
3. Mrs. P.M. Wylam (Manjit Kaur), 38 Gloucester Circus, London, S.E.10.
4. Mr. A.G. James, Editor 'The Multiracial School,' Huddersfield.
5. Dr. Harcharan Singh, M.B.B.S., D.A.R.C.S. (London), 147 Plumstead Road, London, S.E.18.

I am indebted to Mr. Hardip Singh of 126 Derly Road, Southall, and Mr. Harbhajan Singh of 7 Chaucer Road, Poundhill, Crawley, for the tedious job of typing and re-typing the manuscript.

In the end I must acknowledge my indebtedness to the munificent Sangat who have always patted us on the back and flooded us not only with appreciative and encouraging letters but also with the much needed funds to carry on the service.

10 Featherstone Road  
Southall, Middlesex  
UB2 5AA

Hon. General Secretary.  
The Sikh Missionary Society, U.K.  
(Regd.)

November, 1980

## FOREWORD

Those of us who are strangers to the beliefs and practises of Sikhism are grateful to the Sikh Missionary Society for its series of explanatory booklets. This account of the origins of the Sikh Temple as the home of the religious congregation, which is also a social unit with obligations to society as a whole, is a very lucid addition to that series.

Students of comparative religion will be especially struck by Sikhism's attention to the twin paths of faith and works and by the paragraphs on ceremonies and festivals.

It is to be hoped that this booklet will find a wide circulation not only among the adherents to Sikhism, but especially among other communities with whom Sikhs currently live and work.

Similarly straightforward and brief accounts of the beliefs and social obligations of other religious communities (and indeed of non-religious humanists) are equally needed.

EDDIE WIGNALL, M.A.  
Chairman of Urban District Council  
Crawley (Sussex)



## THE SIKH TEMPLE

Man is the product of history. His individual development is rendered possible only because he is a member of some society, tribe, state or nation. No member of society is endowed with so much perfection as to be able, without the assistance of others, to supply his own physical, psychological and moral necessities. The moral standard of the average man is unconsciously kept up by the morals of the best men in society. 'It is when the best men cease trying that the world sinks like lead'. These gifted individuals become a boon to society and not only affect intimately the morals and well being of the society but also they attract people to form a nucleus for mutual spiritual and social benefit, round which individuals develop themselves as parts of a social and spiritual motive force. Finding the existing religious inactive, and therefore ineffective and incapable of guiding society, Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of Sikhism, formed one such nucleus in India by inviting people from all religions to form groups, commonly known as *Chaukies* (Sittings) where nothing but God and God alone was worshipped and the reformation of society was discussed. To the Hindus, he said,

"The true Guru (religious leader) is one who unites all" (Siri Rag).

He reminded Muslims of the teaching of the Holy Quran, "Wama kan annaso illa ummatin wahidatan" (All human beings, whatsoever, are only one community).

The primary object of the Guru was to protect society from internal dissensions and strife and to keep the believers as a single family. "Man without religion" says J.C. Hare, "is the creature of circumstances". The word religion means 'to bind or hold together' and its Japanese equivalent is 'Shukyo'—teaching the society (Shu=society and Kyo=teachings). The Guru's effort was, thus, to create a religion in the true sense that aimed at keeping all united. He gathered round him a picked band of followers, extricated them from the accumulated errors of the past, enjoined on them devotion of thought and excellence of conduct, advised them to translate spiritual knowledge into action and use them for the service of the 'True One' through regular *shabad Chaukies*. In defence against sporadic persecution, the first meetings were usually held in the homes of converts, but soon, the *Chaukies*



became very popular and the Guru presided over huge gatherings which came to be known as Diwans (meetings) in opposition to the Diwan (court) held by the Qazi (where Muslims paid the Tithe (Zakat) and one fifth of any booty they had taken, and the Hindus had to pay poll tax (Jazia) and land tax (Kharaj) to the Qazi). The Guru's Diwans attracted throngs of devoted, free and mentally unbiased people unfettered by rules and rituals. Even those who had been polytheist idol worshipping Hindus could be seen worshipping the 'True One' with the monotheist idol breaking Muslims and the much detested Shudras (so called low castes), who were not allowed to enter the Hindu temples lest they desecrate the Hindu temples and their gods. All voluntarily brought offerings to the Guru in cash and kind. Thus obedience to God through the Guru took precedence over obedience to man. Instead of mere intellectual perception of morality, the actual practice of morality became the rule, after the model of the Guru's own life. The privilege of equality was extended to all who had faith in the Guru's word. "If only there be faith, although it be only a mustard seed", says F.B. Mayer, "sycamore trees can be uprooted, mountains cast into the sea and demons exorcised from their victims". The faithful had already formed the nucleus of a church in the teeth of opposition before the Guru died.

The second Guru, Angad Dev, set up centres for teaching and preaching the founder's ideas and started a common kitchen which was always kept open by the offerings of the Sikhs and no one was refused access to it. The third Guru, Amar Das, established 22 Manjis (seats) in different parts of the country to preach the mission. The fourth Guru, Ram Das, founded the city of Amritsar where he caused the 'pool of nectar' (Amritsar) to be excavated by his followers. In the centre of the pool, by the invitation of the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, the foundation of the holiest temple of the Sikhs was laid in 1589 A.D. by the Muslim saint, Mian Mir, a reputed descendant of the Calif Omar. This temple has four doors in contrast to the one door of a Muslim mosque or Hindu temple. Four doors indicate no preference to any direction as the Muslims attached importance to the direction of Mecca. Also that people of all religions and beliefs and of all countries are welcome into the temple. The temple was desecrated and later destroyed in 1819 by Ahmad Shah Abdali, but only two years later it was reconstructed and redecorated. Now there are more than two hundred historic Sikh temples called Gurudwaras. Besides these.



there are the local Gurudwaras, at least one in every village or town. Some of the historic Gurudwaras are now in Pakistan. The most important Sikh temple is the Golden Temple (Darbar Sahib) at Amritsar whose foundation has been described above. There are four Takhats (Seats of authority)—at Patna (the birth place of Guru Gobind Singh), Nander (the place where Guru Gobind Singh ascended to heaven), Anandpur (the birth place of Khalsa) and Akal Takhat (adjacent to the Golden Temple at Amritsar; from which all important edicts are issued to the Sikh community).<sup>1</sup>

A GURUDWARA (Literally the Guru's door) is a rendezvous chosen by the Guru or Sikhs for meeting and speaking about God and for public worship. It is a place of meditation, divine knowledge, bliss and tranquility. Unlike the Hindu Temples containing altars and idols, the Sikh Temple has only a religious book and no statue or idol. The Sikhs are not supposed to believe in the plurality of God, reverence for rivers or trees, Brahmanical supremacy, the caste system, witchcraft, Hathayoga, animism, idols, or priestcraft. The Gurudwara is a school in which members of the faith are trained in holiness through the philosophy expounded in the Guru's hymns of love and devotion. The hymns inculcate in the followers ideas of love, contentment, humility, the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and purity of mind, body, thought, word and deed. Austerities, fasts, penance, incantations, spells, the worship of heroes, cemeteries and places of cremation, are strictly forbidden to the Sikhs who attend a Gurdwara. Devotees are supposed to desist from working miracles, uttering blessings and curses, and believing in omens. They wear God's name as a necklace and try to practice Nam (remembrance of God's name), Dan (charity) and Ishnan (purity), truthfulness and openness, self-restraint in temper, labour for the purpose of mutual benefit, profitable and edifying speech, humility and forbearance.

The Sikh Temple is usually visible from a long way off because of its tall flag-pole, fully draped in yellow cloth with a yellow flag proudly fluttering in the skies with the Sikh symbol consisting of quoit and dagger in the centre and two curved swords with their handles crossing underneath. In India Gurudwaras are

---

1. The S.G.P.C. has now recognised a fifth Takhat at Damdama Sahib (Bhatinda), vide Sikh Rehat Maryada Ninth Edition (Punjabi), page 12.



often built in Indo-Sarassenic style<sup>1</sup> with domes shaped like a squashed onion on the roof top covered with 'copper gilded with gold' and surrounded by smaller domes built after the Moghul style. The arches are enriched with carvings of flowers and leaves. There is no such thing as a Hindu Shikhra, a Muslim minaret or a Christian spire. Images, idols and statues are conspicuously absent. In their place religious hymns bordered by floral designs, branches and leaves, engender in the beholder aesthetic and religious emotions. The Golden Temple is symbolic of Sikh traditions in architecture, art, religion and history. It rises from the centre of a pool which greatly enhances its beauty by the reflections in its water. According to Percy Brown the Gurudwara is an embodiment of "Religious emotions, materialised in marble, glass, colour and metal".

The devotees take off their shoes before entering the Gurudwara and cover their heads. Passing along an aisle, they reach the focal point where the Holy Granth (The Sikh Holy Book) wrapped in a costly cloth is placed on a platform under a canopy. With reverence, they bow to the ground with folded hands, make offerings of money or eatables, and retracing their steps sit down in the Sangat (the holy congregation). All sit on the floor, women to one side of the aisle and men on the other, indicating the equality of all Sikhs under the Guru.

SANGAT' "The only danger to religion is indifference towards it", says Burk<sup>2</sup> "because indifference is half infidelity". The Gurus knew that the human mind is like a garden wherein something must grow and that if it is neglected, a luxurious growth of weeds would result. To counteract indifference the Gurus made it compulsory for the Sikhs to attend the Sangat in the Gurudwara and to keep constantly in touch with the best in society. The Sangat is usually called Sat Sangat (assembly of the true) or Sadh Sangat (assembly of the Saints), and is akin to Hebrew Qahal (assembly of the Holy). Through the Sangat the novice receives the Guru's instructions and acquires the qualities of the Sadh Sangat through the Bani (word) recited from the Holy Granth. Like children consciously and unconsciously imitating their parents, the Sikhs become imitators of the Guru, the ideal man. They think that as is God, so is the Guru and as is

---

1. In England the Gurudwaras are housed in whatever building is available and are not specially designed and constructed, but almost all carry the Nishan Sahib (the flag pole).

2. Edmund Burk—letter to William Smith, dated 29th Jan., 1795.

the Guru so will be the follower. "If anybody wants to see me, let him go to the Sangat and approach it with faith and reverence, he will surely see me there", says Guru Gobind Singh in *Prem Sanyas*. So in the Sangat no one acts and believes in moral isolation but on the other hand all aspire to live according to a definite model believing that "men take after whom they serve." (War Bihagra M.5)

The Sangat is an ideal company or a miniature ideal society. Like a touch-stone it turns brass into gold. Great prominence in the Sangat is given to living a true life, to modesty, tolerance, patience, service, simplicity, conscientiousness, justice, mercy and benevolence. The hands and mind are always in action for the loftier ideal. The Sikh scripture and traditions lay great emphasis on Sangat for the attainment of final beatitude by rising from the mortal to the spiritual plane through *Dharam Khand* (the region of duty), *Gyan Khand* (the region of knowledge), *Sarm Khand* (the region of effort), *Karam Khand* (the region of action) and *Sacch Khand* (the region of grace). Counting the advantages of the Sangat, Bhai Gurdas writes:-

"Trees that grow near the sandal are perfumed like sandal.

If any of the eight metals are touched by the philosopher's stone  
it becomes gold,

As rivers, streams, and water courses which fall into the Ganges,  
become the Ganges;

So does the Sangat save sinners and wash away the filth of sin.

It saves countless souls from hell and embraces millions of the lost.

The holy see God in the midst of them."

"Guru Nanak felt that the real cause of the misery of the people was their disunity born of diversity of belief. He, therefore, refused to recognise any distinction between man and man and tried to bring his followers together both in thought and deed. He inculcated a common mode of worship and a common social institute by laying the foundation of Sangat and Pangat. Sangat means 'association'. It is getting together of noble and good people. Pangat literally means a row. It stands for people sitting and eating together in the same row in *Guru-ka-Langar*. From the time of Guru Nanak, Sangat and Pangat have gone together for



the Sikhs, both in precept as well as in practice. Wherever there was a Sangat there also was a Langar, as these Sangats were\* “not merely places of worship but also wayside refectories which gave good and shelter to indigent wayfarers.”

## GURU GRANTH SAHIB

This is the sacred book of the Sikhs also popularly known as the Adi Granth. It was compiled by Guru Arjan and installed in the Golden Temple in the year 1604. At that time it contained the hymns of only the first five Gurus and those of Bhagats (saints) of medieval India. The original copy of the Granth fell into the hands of Dhir Mal, the son of the sixth Guru, Har Gobind, who refused to pass it on to the ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur. Guru Gobind Singh, therefore, dictated the whole book once again to his devoted follower Mani Singh at Damdama in the year 1706. He also included in it the hymns written by the Ninth Guru. Before his death Guru Gobind Singh ordered his Sikhs to take good care of the Holy Book and regard it as their final and eternal Guru (enlightener) after him.

The Holy Book contains 1,430 pages and 3,384 hymns, of which 937 have been contributed by fifteen Bhagats and seventeen Bhats. The bulk of the hymns are in Punjabi. The other languages used are Hindi, Persian, Sanskrit, Gujrati, Marathi and dialects of North India. Where reference has been made to Islam, Arabic words have also crept in. The writers come from different corners of India and belong to different castes and creeds signifying the egalitarian character of the Granth. The whole book is in sublime poetry and the hymns have been arranged according to 31 tunes (Ragas). It is an excellent record of social, political and religious thought in India between the 12th and the 17th centuries. This book is unique because it is the authentic record of the Guru's words and is free from interpolations. It can be truly called 'a spiritual dictionary' or 'an encyclopaedia of philosophy.' Commenting about the nature of the Granth, Guru Arjan writes:-

---

\* (Glossary of Punjab Tribes and Castes, Vol. 1, p. 687)



"In this platter and placed three things,

Truth, Harmony and meditation.

These are seasoned with the Nectar—Name of the Lord,

Who is the support of all,

Those who partake of this dish and relish it

Will be saved and emancipated."

(Mundavani M.5, page 1,429)

According to Prof. Puran Singh the Granth is "the scripture of all nations, for it is the lyric of divine love, and all the people of the earth subsist on such glowing lyrical power. Guru Granth Sahib is but one song, one idea and one life."

The Granth was first translated into English by Dr. Trumpp in 1869 who translated 5,719 stanzas out of the total of 15,575. Macauliffe made the next attempt in 1909 and produced six volumes entitled "The Sikh Religion". It has recently been translated into English by Mr. Manmohan Singh in 8 volumes. An eminent Sikh Scholar, Dr. Gopal Singh, has written another very good translation. UNESCO has also produced a translation of selections from the Granth.

In the Sikh Temple the Granth is rested on a small seat placed on a high platform under a canopy. A chawri is waved over it at the time of service as a sign of its spiritual prominence.

The Granth is kept wrapped up in fine cloth. It is opened daily in the early morning after a prayer and closed after the evening prayer.

**KIRTAN.** One main function of the Sangat is Kirtan (singing of the Guru's hymns to the accompaniment of musical instruments). The Guru is manifest in the Sangat through Kirtan because according to Sikhism, "The Guru is the word and the word is Guru" (Kanra M.4). Guru Nanak; the founder of Sikhism demonstrated in a practical way his love for Kirtan by always keeping a bard named Mardana with him. So did Guru Arjan when he invented a type of Saranda (fiddle) for religious music and said,

"Kirtan is like a valuable diamond,

Full of bliss and deep in qualities.

On whomsoever the Lord showers his graces,

Kirtan becomes his sustenance."



Guru Ram Dass likewise said, "Whosoever performs Kirtan or listens to His praises, is loved by the Lord Himself."

Music is a tonic for man's heart. It kindles the soul. According to Plato, music is valuable not only because it refines the feelings and character but also because it preserves and restores health and lends grace to the body and soul. The Guru's idea of Kirtan (music) is given in this verse.

"Of all elements, the most significant is the element of knowledge.

Of all meditations, the most significant is the meditation of One.

Of all sound, the most significant is the Kirtan of God."

(Guru Arjan)

The Sikhs are very fond of hymn singing. Their celestial music can be heard in the Gurdwaras where the Sangat imbibes the Guru's instructions through the thrilling Gurubani set to music by the Ragis (musicians). Sujan Rai, the author of *Khulasa-tul-Tawarikh* (1696) says, "The only way of worship with them is that they read the hymns composed by their Gurus and sing them sweetly with the accompaniment of musical instruments."

NAM. The Sangat sings 'Nam' in the Gurdwara. Nam, like the term *logos* in Greek, has many meanings. It may mean God (*Sukhmani* MV. 16-5) and it may mean God's praises. The immortal and immaculate 'Nam' is to be sung, spoken and meditated on in Sangat. In most cases, it signifies the revelation of God through the Guru's sacred word. Thus in the Sangat everyone concentrates on 'Nam' and dwells on His excellences. It is thus that the holy word (Nam) and the organised fellowship (Sangat) make the love existing between the Guru and the Sikhs more intense than has ever existed between the most romantic lovers of the world.

"The Guru is the Sikh and the Sikh who practises the Guru's word is one with the Guru." (Asa Chhant M.4)

LANGAR. The temptation of evil always surpasses the human powers for resisting it with the result that in spite of inherent progressive tendencies, it remains practically impossible for human beings to fulfil the standard of virtue expected of them. The institution of Langar, started by Guru Nanak at Kartarpur and



Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib



Anandpur (Keshgarh)

This is the place where Khalsa was formed in 1699 A.D.



The Sikh Temple (Hazur Sahib) at Nander



The place where Guru Gobind Singh ascended to heaven



The Akal Takhat (The throne of the timeless) at Amritsar (Punjab),  
India



carried forward by the other Gurus, is a form of sublimation of the human mind and habits. It enjoins all to work and provide for the whole human family. All who visit the Gurudwara sit down together in a row (Pangat) and partake of the simple food offered with loving care irrespective of the recipient's caste, creed, colour or country. Guru Arjan says, "Let all share equally; no one should be viewed an outsider."

Thus in a Gurudwara, idle mysticism has given place to active service done in the midst of worldly relationships. The Langar is a place of charity and service, where each gives according to his capacity and takes according to his needs. The devotees may pay for expenses, bring provisions, pay tithes, donate land to the Langar or personally contribute their labour of love by grinding the corn, cooking the food, fetching the water, cleaning the utensils, bringing fuel or serving food. It is thought meritorious to take meals in a Langar by sitting in a row with others rising above sectarian prejudices and mixing like members of a joint family without differentiation of social, political or spiritual status. Even the great king Akbar once came to Guru Amar Dass and enjoyed his meals in the Langar. The Langar is open day and night and volunteers are always ready to welcome and serve the needy with food. When the provisions run short, the Langar is called 'Mast' which means that the needy have to be content with whatever is available at the moment and that the Langar requires immediate help. Impressed by the Langar in the Gurudwara, I.B. Bannerji in his book, 'Evolution of the Khalsa', writes, "In spite of the fact that the ideal of service and the inculcation of a spirit of brotherhood were equally significant features of almost all the schools of religious revivals in contemporary India; it was in Sikhism alone that a sense of corporate unity gradually evolved." (Indu Bhushan Bannerji, *Evolution of the Khalsa*, Vol. 1, p. 254)

"And from the earliest days of Sikhism, one manifestation of this corporate obligation was the maintenance of the Langar. Teja Singh says, 'It is the glory of the Sikh history that the Guru had in mind the duties of a nation, as much as the duties of an individual.' The Sikhs were given the realisation that their concern was not merely personal salvation, but being members of a community they also had a larger set of duties and responsibilities. The ideal of service in this larger context became intimately bound up with the concept of the 'Sikh Brotherhood' or the 'Sikh



Sangat', so the ideal of service for a Sikh ceases to be merely individualistic and involves a sense of corporate responsibility. A corporate sense could only arise if certain obligations were made definite and universal, so that the character of a corporate liability would evolve." (Guru Nanak Souvenir S.S.F. Bhopal, page 52)

**CEREMONIES.** The Sikhs have rejected the ceremonies and rites which give rise to egotistical pride. They attach more importance to the cultivation of moral values and spiritual development. In every Gurudwara and most of the Sikh homes, people get up at the 'ambrosial hour of the morning' (Amrit Vela), take a bath and meditate on God, through the morning pray prayer 'Japji'.\* Many Sikhs, especially children, who are unable to recite the 'Japji' do recite the Mul Mantra or just Sat Nam Waheguru. 'Asa Di Var' is then recited in the Gurudwara and in the evening 'Raharas' and 'Sohila' prayers are recited. The only other ceremonies the Sikhs have are termed Smagam (functions) and are as follows:-

**BAPTISM** Started on 30th March, 1699, by Guru Gobind Singh, this ceremony consists in preparing 'Amrit' (nectar) by putting some water in a bowl, adding sugar and stirring it with a double edged sword while five baptised Sikhs each recite a prayer. The initiate takes the vows of the Khalsa faith and bows in acceptance of them while five palmfuls of Amrit are given to the novice. He is given the name 'Singh' for male or 'Kaur' for female after his or her name. The member then wears the five Ks : (Kachha — underwear, Kesh — hair, Kara — iron bangle, Kangha — comb, Kirpan — sword). If a baptised Sikh violates the vows, he must confess his guilt before the holy congregation. The decision about punishment or fine (or both) is taken by the Sangat according to the nature of the offence. This is called 'Tankha' and consists of recitation of Gurubani (hymns), service of the Sangat, cleaning the utensils or shoes of the congregation, grinding the corn for the Langar, etc. There is no age limit for baptism.

**MARRIAGE.** It is solemnised by making the bride hold one end of a sash while the other end is held by the bridegroom. The four marriage vows (lavan) are read while the couple walk round

---

\*Life in England being too busy, the practice is rapidly dying out due to shift-work and overtime.



the Holy Granth. They bow in acceptance of the lavan and sit down cross-legged in front of the Holy Granth to listen to the religious obligations of married life. The ceremony is called Anand Karaj which means the ceremony of bliss. It is usually carried out early in the morning.<sup>1</sup> Widow remarriage is permitted in Sikhism and is performed more or less in the same way. It is called CHADAR PAUNA (Offering Protection).

**CHILDBIRTH.** Some days after the birth of a child the whole family accompanied by some relatives and friends, come to the Gurudwara. A prayer is offered in thanksgiving and for a long and blessed life for the child. After a random reading from the Granth, the first letter of the hymn is taken up by the Sangar and names beginning with that letter are suggested for the child.<sup>2</sup> One of the names having been accepted by the parents, the Sangat raises a loud cry of 'Sat Siri Akal' (God is Truth).

**DEATH.** On the death of a Sikh, his body is cremated and the mourners come to the Gurudwara and offer prayers. A Saptah (seven days recitation) or Dusehra (ten days' recitation) of the Holy Granth is started at the house of the deceased. On the appointed day of the Bhog (Finale), 'Sadd Ramkali' is read which depicts the scene of the third Guru's death and the transitory nature of life. It inculcates fortitude and acceptance of the will of God. No memorials are erected and the celebration of death anniversaries (Sharads) is forbidden. The period of mourning usually lasts ten days. During this time the relatives come for condolence and listen to Gurubani (word). The ashes of the Sikh may be scattered on a river or sea.

**PATH.** This is the reading of the Granth from cover to cover and usually takes seven days (Sahaj Path). A continuous recitation by five readers for forty-eight hours is called Akhand Path (incessant recitation by relays). There is no priest in the Gurudwara and anyone can read the Granth but usually a paid

---

1 While every effort is made to celebrate marriage as early as possible, most marriages in England are celebrated in broad daylight considering the difficulties of getting up early and that of accommodating English well-wishers.

2 The Sikh names usually carry a meaning:  
Gurbakhsh Singh : Blessed by the Guru.  
Dhanna Singh : Wealthy.  
Sewa Singh : A dedicated servant of society.  
Ajit Singh : Invincible.



Granthi (reader) is present to assist. Sikhs do not invest the Granthi with any particular social or religious status but he usually commands a respect in society if he is well-read and is able to explain the word to the layman.

At the end of each of these ceremonies the 'Anand' is recited and 'Karah Parshad' (sweet dish)<sup>1</sup> is distributed as a grace from the Lord to all, irrespective of the contribution of each. Path is arranged by a family on occasions of birth, death, opening a business, going abroad and on other social occasions.

**FESTIVALS.** The only festivals celebrated in the Gurudwara are Baisakhi (the birthday of the Khalsa) and Diwali.<sup>2</sup> The birthdays of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, and the martyrdom days of Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur are also celebrated and called Gurpurbs. On these occasions a procession<sup>3</sup> of the Granth is taken out from the Sikh Temple in a flower bedecked palanquin with Sikh ensigns on each side. Five men march in front of the Granth with drawn swords in their hands, representing the five beloved ones (first five baptised Sikhs). Lectures are delivered at important places and prayers are held in all Gurudwaras and Sikh homes.

**GURMATTA.** In the event of an important question affecting the local community, the matter is referred to the Sangat in the Gurudwara and a decision is taken. A resolution is passed by the holy congregation and is called Gurmatta (the Guru's advice). Any attempt made afterwards to contravene or change

- 
1. Prepared from equal weights of sugar, flour, water and butter. Semolina is heated with butter and afterwards hot sweetened water is added and the whole lot stirred into a thick dough-like Karah Parsad. The person who prepares Karah Parsad takes a bath before doing so and repeats the five Sikh Prayers while preparing it.
  2. Diwali is a festival of the Hindus. It is celebrated in honour of Lord Rama's return from 14 years of exile. Incidentally Guru Har Gobind the Sixth Guru of the Sikhs was released from Gawalior jail on this day and was given a tumultuous welcome at Amritsar. The Sikhs celebrate this day in honour of their Guru's release from internment.
  3. Processions are not often taken out in England, to avoid problems of congested traffic. The lectures are delivered inside the temple. The whole programme is in Punjabi unless English guests have been invited.



the decision is thought to be a sacrilegious act if done without consulting the Sangat once again. Important decisions affecting the whole Sikh community are usually taken by a committee of five Jathedars consisting of the four leaders of the Takhts and the Granthi of the Golden Temple at Amritsar who are considered to be authorities on the Sikh religion.\*

The Sikh Temple is not only a place of worship but also a field of action and headquarters of the ideal society conceived by Guru Nanak. It is the pivot of universal brotherhood, voicing the concept of one God and demolishing all prejudices, between man and man, man and woman, religion and religion, rich and poor and high and low. It is free from formalism, ritualism and intolerance. It is a place of gainful activity inviting the individual to lead the life of a householder and plunge into the field of action by serving others. It is a school imparting lessons in modesty, humility, equality, purity, fraternity, service, knowledge and devotion, and it caters for the physical, mental, moral, ethical and spiritual needs of its scholars. It is a place where the individual always remains in the divine presence and is exposed to no attack from within or without. It is the abode of human brotherhood, a centre of shared life, a sanctuary of God, the headquarters of the commonwealth of people consecrated to God; people who look upon service not as an irksome duty but as an honourable task and a privilege. It is a resting place amid the conflicting creeds and practices of man, highlighting the necessity of living a religion rather than only professing it. Everyone here prays for everyone everywhere invoking, "THE GOOD OF ALL UNDER THE WILL OF THE LORD." (Ardas)

### NOTES ON SOME SIKH TEMPLES

**The Golden Temple.** In 1577, Guru Ram Das asked his Sikhs to excavate a spacious pool at a place in a jungle and later he founded the city of Ramdas Pur (after his name). The city is now called Amritsar (Pool of immortality). Guru Arjan later completed the brick work on the pool and built the Golden Temple in the middle of the pool. Maharaja Ranjit Singh roofed the Temple with gilded sheets of copper and thus the Temple previously called Harimandir (The House of God) also came to be called 'The Golden Temple.' The Sikhs also call it Darbar Sahib (The Guru's

\* Important decisions in England are taken by the individual Synods. There is no central body to link up all Sikh Temples and standardize the procedure of celebrations and functions. The necessity is recognised by almost all the Gurdwaras and a central body may be formed soon.



court) in reverence. The Holy Granth is read day and night in the Temple by a relay of Granthis (readers).

Over the Deodhi (gateway to the Temple) is a treasury where lie four sets of gold doors, jewelled canopies and umbrellas and the golden spades used to dig the holy pool while the foundation was laid. Many other precious relics can also be seen.

**The Akal Takhat.** The Akal Takhat faces the Golden Temple and is opposite to the Golden Temple gateway. It was built by Guru Hargobind. This has been the seat of political and religious conferences of the Sikhs and all important decisions (Gurmattas) are taken here. It houses the weapons and relics of the last five Gurus and is one of the seats of authority of the Sikhs.

**Anand Pur.** This temple was once a fortress built by Guru Gobind Singh and lies at the foot of the Himalayas in a valley. The main part of this temple is the Keshgarh, where Guru Gobind Singh instituted the Khalsa. Many of the Guru's weapons can still be seen in this temple.

In the fortress is a well (Baoli) with 150 steps leading down to the water. Near here is the Sisganj where the head of the ninth Guru was cremated after it had been brought from Delli by a faithful Sikh.

**Hazur Sahib.** This temple was constructed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh at a place where Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs ascended to heaven in 1708. It is in Nander (Deccan) near the river Godavari. In its Toshakhana (treasury) can be seen the weapons, jewellery, clothes, canopies and a small dagger and gold tipped arrows of the Guru. Ever since the departure of the Guru to his heavenly abode the Sikhs have kept a horse in the Guru's stable like the one used by the Guru when he was alive. A bluish white horse can still be seen there. A procession with the horse is taken out on the special days commemorating the events in the Guru's life.

**Nankana Sahib.** This temple is situated at a distance of 55 miles west of Lahore (Pakistan). This is where Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh religion was born and had spent his early days. There are many other Gurudwaras in Nankana Sahib commemorating various events of the Guru's life. In an under-



ground cellar of the Janam Asthan (birth place) lie the bones of the martyrs who sacrificed their lives to free the Gurudwaras from a corrupt priest Narian Das in 1921. Some of the crusaders were cut limb by limb, others were burnt alive and their leader was tied to a Jand tree with his feet up and head downwards and was roasted in that position by lighting fire beneath him. The half burnt Jand tree still survives to tell the woeful tale.

## MANAGEMENT

The management of the Gurudwaras rests in the hands of an elected Committee. The members of the Committee are elected out of the Sangat, and all adult Sikhs, whether male or female, have the right to vote. Women are also elected to the Committees and have equal rights. The election of the historic Sikh Temples in India usually takes place every four years under Government supervision. In England each Sikh Temple has its own constitution and more or less the same method of election and management. Elections in England usually take place annually.

## THE SIKH ANTHEM

DEH SHIVA BAR MOHE IHAY  
SHUBH KARMAN TE KABHOUN  
NA TARAUN

Grant unto me this boon, O  
Lord, That I may never be  
deterred from doing good deeds.

NA DRAUN ARR SION JAB  
JAI LARON  
NISCHAY KAR APNI JIT  
KARAUN

I should have no fear of the  
enemy when I go to battle.  
And turn victory decidedly to  
my side.

AR SIKH HAU APNAY HEE  
MAN KAU  
IHO LALACH HAUN GUN  
TAU UCHRAUN

In my mind there is but one  
desire. That I may ever be  
singing thy praises.

JAB AAV KEE AUDH  
NIDHAN BANAY,  
AT HI RUN MAI TAB  
JOOJH MARAUN

And, when the time comes, I  
should die fighting heroically  
in the thick of action on the  
battlefield.

This hymn was the favourite prayer of Guru Gobind Singh.

The Guru uses the word SHIVA for GOD and not the Hindu deity.

Heroic death on the battlefield, singing the praise of the Lord is the  
goal of Guru Gobind Singh and the Khalsa.



## THE SIKH SYMBOLS

When Guru Gobind Singh initiated 'THE BELOVED FIVE' to become the Khalsa he ordained that the following five articles must be worn on the body by each Khalsa:

1. **KESH—LONG (UNCUT) HAIR** In accordance with the Sikh philosophy human body is sacred because in it dwells the Spirit of God and what makes it the living image of God is the Mind and Spirit of Man. A complete human being must preserve all the hair on his body as essential and inseparable part of the body. The complete Man who is physically and spiritually the image of God is conceived in Sikh Scriptures as a man with hair and turban on his head. (SABAT—SURAT DASTAR SIRA)
2. **COMB (KANGHA)** The comb is inseparable from the hair, which must be combed daily to keep them clean and healthy.
3. **IRON BANGLE (KARRA)** This is symbolic of perfection, a reminder to the wearer to be mindful of his role of a spiritual aspirant and a useful citizen.
4. **SHORTS (KACHHEHRA)** A Sikh with his 'KACHH' (underwear) could actively go to the battle fields and work on any active secular or religious duty. This is a symbol of Continence and restraint of passion.
5. **KIRPAN (SWORD)** Prof. Puran Singh writes: "Every Sikh is to wear His sword, not his own. Kirpan is a gift from the Guru. It is not an instrument of offence or defence. It is the mind made intense by the love of Guru. . . . symbol of myriad personality of Guru's Sikh, that knows no defeat, no disappointment the personality that is unconquerable in its hope, in its spiritual radiance".

The five symbols are the symbols of our faith and love for the Guru.

## DAILY RECITATIONS

The hymns composed by our Gurus are called GURBANI. These are the sacred Scriptures of the Sikhs.

Some Bani is in the form of long verses. We are instructed to recite some Gurbani daily as a matter of course. Various Banees are specified for different times of the day.

MORNING RECITATIONS. These are the five Banees recited when 'AMRIT' is prepared for the initiation ceremony.

1. JAPJI (GURU NANAK)
2. JAAP (GURU GOBIND SINGH)
3. SWAYAY (GURU GOBIND SINGH)
4. BAINTEE CHOUPAI (GURU GOBIND SINGH)
5. ANAND SAHIB (GURU AMAR DASS)

MANY DEVOTEES LOVE TO RECITE SUKHMANI DAILY.

### EVENING PRAYER

6. RIHRAS SAHIB. This consists of selected shabads, Baintee-choupai and six stanzas of Anad Sahib.

### BED TIME PRAYER

7. KIRTAN SOHILS. This consists of five selected Shabds.

GURBANI should be read correctly. It is therefore necessary to learn Punjabi. Also we must try to understand the meaning of Gurbani and act upon Guru's Words as far as possible.

## MOOL MANTRA

### THE ESSENCE OF GURU NANAK'S MESSAGE

EK-ONKAR	There is but one God
SAT NAAM	Eternal Truth is His Name
KARTA PURKH	He is the Creator
NIRBHAU	He is without fear
NIRVAIR	He is without Enmity
AKAAL-MURAT	Timeless is His Image
AJUNI	He is beyond Birth and Death
SAIBHANG	He is Self-Illuminated
GURPRASAD	He is realised by the Grace of the True Guru

## GUR-MANTAR

'WAHEGURU' is 'GUR-MANTAR'

Praise the Lord by chanting His Name

WAHEGURU

The Wonderful Lord.





Sant Baba Isher Singh Ji Rarewale  
5-8-1905 to 28-8-1975



## A list of Sikh Missionary Society's Publications



All books except those marked \* are for free distribution to individuals.

- 1 Introduction to Sikhism.
- 2 Guru Nanak (for Children).
- 3 The Guru's Way (for Children)
- 4 In the Guru's Footsteps (for Children)
- 5 Guru Arjan, the Apostle of Peace
- 6 The Sikh Symbols.
- 7 The Sikh Bangle.
- 8 A Spur to the Sikh Youth.
- 9 Main Sikh Kion Han (Punjabi).
- 10 Rehni Rahe Soi Sikh Mera (Punjabi).
- 11 The Gurudwara (The Sikh Temple).
- 12 The Saint-Soilder.
- 13 Punjabi Teacher through English Medium.
- 14 Glimpses of Sikhism.
- 15 The Sikh Marriage Ceremony.
- 16 The Supreme Sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadar.
- 17 The Sikh Woman.
- 18 The Turban and the Sword of the Sikhs.
- 19 The Teachings of Guru Amardas.
- \* 20 The Sikhs and their Way of Life.
- \* 21 Sacha Guru (Punjabi).
- 22 'O' Level in Punjabi.
- 23 The Turban Victory.
- \* 24 Varan Bhai Gurdas.
- \* 25 The Sikh Ideology.

For information on Sikhism, please write to:-

**THE SIKH MISSIONARY SOCIETY, U.K. (Regd.)**

10 Featherstone Road, Southall, Middlesex

Tel & Fax: 0181-574 1902

ISBN No. 0-900692-11-1